

inimitable Peter Sellers, here in his first non-Goon Show persona. The performance won him a Best Actor BAFTA, cemented his status as a film star, and, most importantly, led him to discover a character that would surface several times in his career: the innocent fool who, while wholly serious in his demeanor and actions, is completely unaware of his true nature and foibles (think Hrundi V. Bakshi in *The Party*, Inspector Clouseau, and Chauncey Gardner in *Being There*). The disc's audio commentary by Robert and Gemma Ross offers an encyclopedic recognition of all the film's actors—minor or major—with insights into their various careers.

As for Stanley Windrush, having failed nine times to secure a job, he appeals to his doting, wealthy Aunt Dolly (Margaret Rutherford) for help. She treats her nephew Tracepurcel to employ Windrush at the arms factory, but once under Tracepurcel's control, he becomes an unwitting pawn in the industrialist's financial machinations. Windrush, duped in *Private's Progress*, once again becomes the fall guy for this gang of upper-class crooks who have concocted an underhanded arms deal with a shady character named Mr. Mohammed (Marne Maitland) from an unnamed Arab country.

Is this perhaps hinting at the last vestiges of colonial meddling and exploitation after the debacle of the Suez Crisis in 1956? At the same time, Windrush is also dragooned into the union by Kite—"It's not compulsory but you've got to join, see"—and soon finds himself caught between both sides in their power politics. When Windrush, who has agreed to participate in management's covert time and motion study, finds ways for the workers to be more productive, an outraged Kite calls a strike.

The newspapers discover a great story in Stanley Windrush, a decent man who is ostracized—"banished to Coventry"—by the union for doing a job more efficiently. Having refused to join the strike and to instead re-enter the factory on his own, for which he gains public and media support, but also causes a nationwide solidarity strike by other unions. Finding himself isolated and alienated from everyone, Stanley reluctantly agrees to appear on *Argument*, a TV debate show hosted by Malcolm Muggeridge. As the panel attempts to railroad him as a victim of overwork, he impetuously empties a suitcase full of hush money that Cox had slipped him. Greed and self-interest come to the fore as chaos erupts among panel participants and members of the studio audience to get their hands on some of the filthy lucre.

As Marcia Landy concludes about such films in *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*, "In contrast to the comedies of consensus produced during the 1930s and the war years, these satiric comedies portray the world of the late 1950s as a time of apathy, stagnation, crass materialism, and intellectual bankruptcy."—James B. Evans

## The Wind Will Carry Us

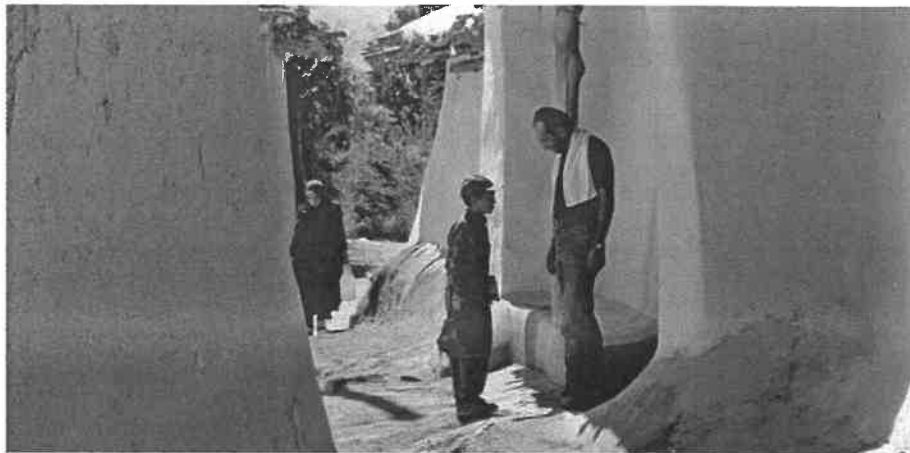
Produced by Marin Karmitz and Abbas Kiarostami; directed by Abbas Kiarostami; written by Abbas Kiarostami, based on an idea by Mahmoud Aiden; cinematography by Mahmoud Kalari; edited by Abbas Kiarostami; music by Peyman Yazdani; starring Behzad Dorani, Farzad Sohrabi, and other residents of Siah Dareh. Blu-ray, color, Persian dialogue with English subtitles, 118 min., 1999. A Criterion Collection release, [www.criterion.com](http://www.criterion.com).

*The Wind Will Carry Us*, a film of breathtaking visual beauty, is now available in a new 4K restoration from The Criterion Collection. The 1999 production can be seen as a summary statement by Abbas Kiarostami of his then-thirty-year filmmaking career in Iran, as the twentieth century drew to a close. Although the legendary auteur would continue to work in his native land until his passing in 2016, his most celebrated twenty-first-century features were later international efforts: *Certified Copy* (2010) with Juliette Binoche was an Italian-based European production; *Like Someone in Love* (2012) was shot in Japan.

*The Wind Will Carry Us* may not be Kiarostami's greatest work, but it is his most representative. Surely, there is a semiautobiographical subtext to a movie about a filmmaker traveling to a remote village in Iran that has largely been untouched by twentieth-century modernity to discreetly document local customs—in this instance, the ceremony and mourning rituals that will follow the death of an elderly woman. Kiarostami's own experiences as an (at times intrusive) documentarian could not have been far from the director's mind when he made this film. As it is described by the poet and novelist Kaveh Akbar in the booklet that accompanies the Criterion edition, *The Wind Will Carry Us* is "a masterpiece of lived in ethical complexity and high spiritual stakes...a self-conscious interrogation of artists' relationship to their subjects."

*Wind* also serves as a showcase for the signature motifs Kiarostami honed over three decades of creative output. Most notably, it features nonprofessional actors (in this instance, the residents of the tiny, remote hamlet of Siah Dareh in Iranian Kurdistan). Especially important is the pivotal presence of Farzad (Farzad Sohrabi), a young boy, often in motion, who animates much of the establishing action and serves as something of the movie's moral compass. He is another in a long line of such children to capture the attention of Kiarostami, from his first short film, the charming *Bread and Alley* (1970)—which lifted its score from The Beatles' "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da"—and his first feature, *The Traveler* (1974), shot in the provincial city of Malayer; and throughout his dramas and documentaries in following years, culminating in *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), the triumph that first brought Kiarostami to the attention of international audiences. *Friend's House*, the greatest of his boy-on-the-move pictures, which once again presented a fictional story embedded in real locations featuring their residents, was the first of three films he shot in the rural village of Koker.

Although he stressed the inherent importance of bucolic settings in his films as a means of achieving a certain type of clarity, simplicity, and realism, the director also shared the observation—in *Lessons with Kiarostami* (NY: Sticking Place Books, 2015, edited by Paul Cronin)—that "stories set outside cities, away from urban living, are easier to get past the censor in Iran." Although the film has its eyes on grander themes, there are several slyly subversive passages that slip by. Kiarostami's signature blend of fiction and nonfiction, however, was not limited to rural districts, as seen in the Tehran-based *Close-Up* (1990) which pushed the definition of the "nonfiction" film beyond the breaking point, combining *cinéma vérité*, straight documentary, and scenes recreated long after the fact by their actual participants, and enhanced by dramatic contrivances. As the director explained (with some understatement), several of his films are best understood as "simultaneously a documentary and a work of fiction."



In *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the newly arrived "engineer" (Behzad Dorani) is familiarized with the rural community with the help of village youngster Farzad (Farzad Sohrabi).



In an exchange of philosophical observations at the conclusion of *The Wind Will Carry Us*, the local doctor advises the “engineer” to “never close your eyes to the beauty of this world.”

Two additional Kiarostami trademarks also characterize *The Wind Will Carry Us*: shooting in and through the windshields of cars, and the essential presence of poetry. The former is not to be underestimated—indeed the whole car thing approaches something of a fetish. Gracefully deployed in *Wind*, there are moments, in other Kiarostami films, when the practice tries the patience. But for the director, cars provide “a beautiful stillness,” and “the best place I know for looking and reflecting, for facilitating endless conversations.” Not surprisingly, one of Kiarostami’s published collections of photographs is comprised entirely of images shot from inside moving vehicles. But if cars are used tactically, poetry touches on something closer to this auteur’s core. Stanley Kubrick insisted that films should be received on an emotional level, similar to music. Kiarostami, whose verses have been published in numerous collections—including *Walking with the Wind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press Film Archive, 2002)—likewise emphasizes that films are best understood as poetry, and *The Wind Will Carry Us* is certainly his most overtly poetic feature. Two significant rhyming images, each involving an object being carried by a current—the first involving an apple, the latter involving a human bone—both elaborately orchestrated shots, are essential in underscoring this tone. “Poetic films dealing with human problems can be political. They just don’t point an accusing finger,” Kiarostami lectured in *Lessons*, “A truly influential film is one that reveals things that might previously have been obscure.”

*Wind* adds more than a hint of comedy to this familiar mix, as the off-screen matriarch throws a wrench into the documentarian’s schedule by stubbornly clinging to life, and with the way its protagonist (Behzad Dorani) has to race to his car and drive to higher ground (the local cemetery), the only spot where his cell phone can function,

whenever his producer in Tehran calls, impatiently waiting for news of progress. Cooling his heels with decreasing patience, Dorani, whose unnamed character hides behind the thinly veiled pretense as an “engineer,” is unwittingly served a series of life lessons from the locals with whom he interacts, starting with his first guide (and grandson of the matriarch), the young Farzad.

Notably, three of these characters are women, who represent distinct generations in a community whose traditions suggest more continuity than change. The first is a no-nonsense figure who serves tea at what passes for a local café, and whose domestic life hints at marital struggles that call to mind Kiarostami’s still underseen pre-Revolutionary gem, *The Report* (1977). Noting that “all women serve” while rhetorically asking “who takes care of me?” she speaks knowingly of how women have three jobs: working by day; keeping house for their husbands; and enduring a “third job” that takes place at night.

A second woman, whose chores include overseeing the modest rooms where the crew has been lodged, is well familiar with the “third job”—she is robustly pregnant with her tenth child. She tends to her other duties as well, matter of factly returning to her work the day after giving birth, with her newborn infant nearby. Following in the footsteps of her life experience will likely be the sixteen-year-old milkmaid, whose presence fills the screen for one of the film’s two most vital passages. Only partially illuminated by a gas lamp in the darkness, the camera holds her in a single shot as she dutifully milks a cow; to pass the time (or are his motives less noble?) Dorani recites two poems by Forugh Farrokhzad, who died in a car crash in 1967 at the age of thirty-two. Not surprisingly, Farrokhzad’s frank expressions of female sensuality and longing (as well as her modestly scandalous private life—married and divorced by twenty, her free-spirited lifestyle led to her son being

removed from her custody) found her poems falling into disfavor after the Islamic Revolution, which lends a subtly subversive touch to their inclusion here.

The first poem quoted is “The Gift”: “If you come to my house, friend/bring me a lamp and a window I can look through.” The second poem is recited in full, as the camera holds the shot in the dim light for nearly two minutes. In it, a woman addresses a furtive lover: “My night so brief is filled with devastating anguish. Do you hear the whisper of the shadows? This happiness feels foreign to me. I am accustomed to despair.” The last two lines of the poem suggest the audience should take note of its messages of beauty, love, and the fragility of life: “The wind will carry us! The wind will carry us!”

Our unnamed “engineer” also has encounters with the local schoolteacher, whose exams challenge his young charges with questions about good and evil (and whose own car ride conversation casts an unexpectedly jaundiced eye on local traditions), and an unseen worker, the nascent love interest of the milkmaid, digging just below the cliff near the cemetery in the service of a vaguely specified telecommunications project. It is the life-threatening collapse of his excavation that brings the doctor to the village, who will tend to that victim, provide a final act of kindness for the ailing matriarch, and deliver to our documentarian, as he rides on the back of the doctor’s motorcycle, his closing life lessons.

The doctor is something of a poet himself, sometimes reciting classic verses by way of medical prognosis; in other instances, sagely speaking in his own voice about his true vocation, a deep appreciation of nature’s splendors. Death truly comes “when you close your eyes to the beauty of this world,” the poet/physician declares. “They say the other world is more beautiful,” Dorani responds. The doctor counters, “But who has come back from there to tell us, if it is beautiful or not?” Their conversation about life and death offers an extension of the themes explored by Kiarostami in his preceding feature, *Taste of Cherry* (1997), which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes. *The Wind Will Carry Us* is unambiguous on this grand question, as the doctor invokes the words of Omar Khayyam, the eleventh-century Persian mathematician, philosopher, and poet: “Prefer the present to those fine promises.” As the motorcycle traverses the impossibly beautiful countryside fields, the two men recite the last line together: “Even a drum sounds melodious from afar, prefer the present.”

In addition to the disc’s accompanying booklet, the Criterion edition includes a feature-length “making-of” documentary, a 2002 video interview with Kiarostami, and a video essay featuring the director’s poetry, narrated by the distinguished translator and Kiarostami collaborator Massoumeh Lahiji.

—Jonathan Kirshner

MICHAEL WINTERBOTTOM'S *SHOSHANA*: A HISTORICAL FILM WITH CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

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